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## Times are tough, but Utahns are still giving

### *Some local charities far better off than in 2007*

**By Jennifer Toomer-Cook**  
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Utahns are pinching their own pennies while pouring them into the hands of others.

Despite dinged wallets due to high gas and food prices, Utah residents are giving more to at least some charities. Crossroads Urban Center got more food donations last month alone than it usually gets all summer. Salt Lake's American Cancer Society fundraising is up 6 percent. And Primary Children's Medical Center took in more than a half-million extra dollars so far this year.

The giving surge seems to defy common sense. Utah's unemployment is rising, food prices have jumped 5 percent in the past five months, and a gallon of gas has soared above the \$4 mark, taking its sweet time in coming back down. In addition, a national poll last May found that half of the respondents had cut charitable giving, along with other parts of their budgets.

But a boost in benevolence doesn't shock Boston College's Center on Wealth and Philanthropy, which a couple of years ago ranked Utah the nation's third-most-generous state.

"The economic downturn doesn't immediately affect people's giving," said Bob Kenny, the center's associate director. "There's usually a bit of a lag in there, and it just doesn't translate as dramatically as people think it might."

Even so, the state of the economy is making some nonprofits nervous.

Utah's unemployment rate last month hit 3.5 percent, up from 2.7 percent reported a year ago, according to the state Department of Workforce Services. That's 48,900 Utahns who were considered unemployed last month, versus 37,000 a year ago.

The jobless rate, combined with food and energy inflation, can affect how much money there is to go around for nonprofits and other public programs. State legislative leaders this week are expected to hear how tax revenues are doing this fiscal year, which started a month ago. Some lawmakers worry that revenues for programs will fall short.

That worries The Road Home, whose homeless services are in bigger demand these days.

"What we are forecasting is government sources are going to be challenged with restricted revenues this year. That will definitely be a challenge that is passed on to nonprofit agencies that have government partnerships," Road Home executive director Matthew M. Minkevitch said. "We hope we have enough contributions to meet the (increased) demand for our services."

Some charities across the nation also are feeling the pinch. The Chicago-based Center for Cultural Interchange has issued a national call for families, Utahns included, to host foreign exchange students. The center says it has been hurt for the first time. In March, the food pantry

served 44 percent more people than it did in February.

So Crossroads took the proactive approach, launching food-drive competitions and campaigns, executive director Glenn Bailey said. The center collected more than 4 tons of food in July alone — more than a typical full summer's worth of donations.

"People know rent, food and gas are up, and people who need help are in more desperate situations," Bailey said, "and they're responding, because people in Utah are very generous."

TurboTax last year ranked Salt Lake City No. 1 in the country for charitable giving, with an average \$2,196 in annual giving.

The year before, Boston College's philanthropy center ranked Utah third in the nation in charitable giving. Half of donations here were classified as religious giving. The center noted that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the majority faith in Utah, are asked to tithe 10 percent of their income and encouraged to make other offerings.

Yet a May poll of 1,000 Christian adults nationwide found nearly half had pulled back on charitable giving because of the economic downturn. But the survey, conducted by Wilson Research Strategies for Christian ministries consultants Dunham+Company, also found that Intermountain states, including Utah, would be the among least impacted by a donations decline. The survey had a margin of error of 3.1 percent.

Despite that forecast, Bailey still has concerns.

"Economically, the impact has not been felt for more than a year at this point, especially in Utah," he said. "But I think as this downturn goes on, and deepens, you'll see a downturn in our case."

Kenny at Boston College's philanthropy center notes most people plan for their giving over time. "A down-trend like we're in isn't going to change dramatically the long-term giving that people do."

"A lot of the downturn is about people being worried," Kenny said. "But as far as the actual behavior, it's almost too early to tell."

For now, several local charities are doing well. Community Shares, a group of nonprofits that include disability to education groups, saw an 18 percent increase in sign-ups for last week's golf tournament fundraiser, Community Shares chief executive officer Lynne Brandley said.

United Way raised \$11.1 million in the fiscal year that ended June 30. That's a \$600,000 increase from the year before, director of marketing and communications Bryson Despain said.

The Utah Food Bank this summer received 51,781 pounds of food — 20,000 pounds-plus more than seen a year ago, spokeswoman Jessica Pugh reported. Cash and Web donations combined are \$69,200, up nearly \$2,300 from last year.

The American Cancer Society's western division, which includes Salt Lake City, has seen fundraising grow 6 percent compared to last year, Salt Lake office communications manager Patricia Monsoor said.

Primary Children's Medical Center this year took in an extra \$29,000 in its radiothon and nearly \$473,000 more in its telethon than last year, spokeswoman Bonnie Midget said.

"The majority of our donations come from hundreds of thousands of smaller gifts," Midget said. "We feel really good that so many people have been willing to keep that gift in their budget ... even in these difficult times."

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